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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 003159

SIPDIS

DEPT. FOR DRL SUSAN O'SULLIVAN

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TAGS: PHUM PREL PARM KDEM KJUS CH EUN USEU BRUSSELS

SUBJECT: EU/CHINA: READOUT OF JUNE 30 HUMAN RIGHTS SEMINAR
ON ICCPR

REF: A. BEIJING 11573

1B. BERLIN 2422

1C. BEIJING 10293

1D. O'HARA/FENNERTY ET. AL. E-MAIL 03/02/04

Classified By: USEU Poloff Van Reidhead for reasons 1.4 (b, d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: On June 29-30 the EU and China held a joint seminar on Chinese ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (refs A, C). EU reporting, relayed to poloff by a Policy Unit staffer, described the seminar as useful overall -- with a "wonderful atmosphere" -- despite China's emphasis on accomplishments and reluctance to discuss problems. The Chinese stressed that ICCPR ratification would take years, but they looked forward to learning from EU experience. While some EU Member States are linking progress on ICCPR to the debate over lifting the EU arms embargo on China, none have come out with specific conditions. The Director of Human Rights Watch's Brussels office said the EU's HR dialogue with China was not credible, and called the joint seminars "closed door little schmoozing shops." END SUMMARY.

12. (C) According to Chris Holtby, a UK-detailee to HiRep Solana's Policy Unit, China was represented at the seminar by the MFA and sixteen of the other "entities" participating in a PRC task force charged with laying the ground for ICCPR ratification. MFA DG Li Baodong delivered China's opening remarks, followed by VFM Zhang Yesui. The EU was represented by experts from 13 Member States and the Commission.

13. (C) Describing UK and EU Presidency reports of the seminar, Holtby said that while the EU wanted to discuss continuing HR deficits, the Chinese wanted to focus almost exclusively on past accomplishments. As a result there was no real discussion of substantive issues. The central Chinese message was that ICCPR ratification was a long-term project requiring several years of hard work to complete. Yet the Chinese assured the EU that Beijing had made a political commitment to proceed, and looked forward to EU assistance in doing so. In a statement that resonated with the Europeans, the Chinese said they hoped to learn from the experience of countries like Spain and Portugal that also went through lengthy HR transitions. After the seminar, "There was a lot of gushing (on the EU side) about the wonderful atmosphere," Holtby said. The Dutch EU Presidency now wants to form smaller EU-China focus groups to tackle specific aspects of ICCPR ratification, perhaps using an article-by-article approach. The UK promised to supply the Dutch with ideas.

Arms Embargo Linkage?

14. (C) Asked whether ICCPR ratification would figure in the debate over lifting the EU arms embargo on China, Holtby (who represents the Policy Unit in PSC and Working Group discussions of China), said that "some" Member States had made "general" linkages between progress on ICCPR and lifting the embargo. But as far as he knew, none had come forward with specific conditions.

The View from Human Rights Watch

15. (C) Asked how the HR NGO community assesses the EU-China HR dialogue and subsidiary seminars, Human Rights Watch Brussels Director Lotte Leicht argued forcefully that they were not credible (septel). She viewed as "outrageous" the EU's unwillingness to offend China. The EU will not even ask for the release of political prisoners, let alone for detailed information on their welfare and whereabouts, she said. Calling the EU-China meetings "closed door little schmoozing shops," Leicht said that HRW was no longer willing to participate for fear of becoming an accomplice of the EU's appeasement of China. (Note: Leicht had the same view of the EU's HR dialogue with Iran).

Sammis